

Message Text

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TAGS: PFOR, TH, CB, LA

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI' VIEWS ON THAI RELATIONS WITH
CAMBODIA AND LAOS

REF: BANGKOK 24220

1. DURING A NOVEMBER 21 MEETING WITH THE AMBASSADOR, FOREIGN
MINISTER CHATCHAI SAID HIS RECENT TALK WITH CAMBODIAN DEPUTY
PREMIER IENG SARY AT POIPET HAD BEEN HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL. CHATCHAI
SAID THAT ORIGINALLY THESE TALKS HAD BEEN PLANNED AT THE DIRECTOR
GENERAL LEVEL. SHORTLY BEFORE THEY WERE TO TAKE PLACE, HE
RECEIVED WORD FROM IENG SARY THAT THE DEPUTY PREMIER HIMSELF
WOULD ATTEND. AT THAT POINT CHATCHAI AGREED TO BE PRESENT
ALSO.

2. CHATCHAI SAID THAT AT THIS MEETING, AS IN THEIR EARLIER
DISCUSSIONS, HE FOUND IENG SARY MODERATE AND REASONABLE. HE
IS CONVINCED THAT IENG SARY IS NOT A DOCTRINAIRE COMMUNIST BUT
IS RATHER A CAMBODIAN NATIONALIST. IN REPLY TO A QUESTION,
CHATCHAI SAID HE DOES NOT BELIEVE IENG SARY IS HANOI PUPPET
BUT IS RATHER "PEKING'S MAN" IN CAMBODIA.

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3. ON THE SUBSTANCE OF THEIR DISCUSSIONS, CHATCHAI SAID HE URGED IENG SARY TO OPEN THE BORDER WITH THAILAND AND LET HIS PEOPLE MOVE FREELY. IF THE KHMER COULD TRAVEL, CHATCHAI SAID, HE DID NOT BELIEVE THERE WOULD BE NEARLY AS MUCH LIKELIHOOD OF ADDITIONAL REFUGEES MOVING INTO THAILAND. CHATCHAI SAID HE ALSO TOLD IENG SARY THAT IT WAS UP TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CAMBODIA AND THOSE OF THE OTHER INDOCHINA STATES WHETHER OR NOT THE REFUGEES RETURNED. IF THEY RELAXED TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS AND MADE THINGS ATTRACTIVE FOR THE REFUGEES, THEY WOULD PROBABLY RETURN. OTHERWISE THEY WOULD STAY IN THAILAND AND THERE WOULD BE THE ADDITIONAL RISK THAT MORE WOULD FOLLOW.

4. CHATCHAI SAID IENG SARY DID NOT ASK FOR THE RETURN OF AIRCRAFT BELONGING TO THE FORMER CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT NOR DID HE RAISE OTHER PROBLEMS. HE STRESSED THAT HIS OBJECTIVE WAS TO "FILL HIS PEOPLES' STOMACHS." IN THIS CONNECTION THE CAMBODIANS SAID THEY URGENTLY NEEDED SALT (APPARENTLY USED TO CURE FISH FROM THE TONLE SAP) AND GASOLINE. THE DEPUTY PREMIER SAID CAMBODIA WOULD HAVE ADEQUATE RICE WHEN THE CROP COMES BUT NOW HAS NO MONEY. AS A RESULT CHATCHAI SAID HE AND IENG SARY HAD AGREED ON A BARTER ARRANGEMENT UNDER WHICH THAILAND WOULD SEND SALT AND GASOLINE TO CAMBODIA IN EXCHANGE FOR LOGS AND FISH. CHATCHAI SAID ALSO THAT THAILAND WAS PROVIDING SALT TO CAMBODIA AT LESS THAN HALF THE NORMAL PRICE BUT GIVEN THEIR OWN BUDGETARY PROBLEMS THEY COULD NOT CONTINUE THIS CONCESSIONAL ARRANGEMENT FOR LONG.

5. TURNING TO LAOS, CHATCHAI SAID THAT IN CONTRAST WITH THEIR DEVELOPING RELATIONS WITH CAMBODIA, THAILAND'S RELATIONS WITH LAOS ARE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT. HE NOTED THAT THE LAO BY NATURE ARE "GENTLE PEOPLE." AS A RESULT, HE IS CONVINCED THAT SOMEONE IS EGGING THEM ON. CHATCHAI SAID THAT IN HIS COMMENTS TO THE PRESS HE HAD CAREFULLY REFRAINED FROM IDENTIFYING THE SOURCE OF EXTERNAL PRESSURE ON LAOS BUT HE DID NOT DISAGREE WHEN THE PRESS ASSUMED THAT HE REFERRED TO NORTH VIETNAM AND THE SOVIET UNION.

6. CHATCHAI WAS OBVIOUSLY SEEKING AN OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT TO US HIS SIDE OF THE PRESENT THAI-LAO FRACAS. DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS KOSON SINTHAWANON, WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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DISCUSSION, PULLED OUT A COPY OF THE MAP ATTACHED TO THE 1926 THAI-FRENCH AGREEMENT WHICH, ACCORDING TO CHATCHAI AND KOSON, CLEARLY SHOWED THAT THE ISLAND ON WHICH THE THAI PATROL BOAT IS NOW BEACHED IS ON THE THAI SAID OF THE CHANNEL. (SECTION OF THIS MAP PUBLISHED IN BANGKOK PRESS NOVEMBER 21.) CHATCHAI IS PLAYING THIS ISSUE DOWN PUBLICLY, BUT IT IS OBVIOUS THAT HE AND HIS GOVERNMENT ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED AND ARE SEEKING WAYS TO TEMPER WHAT THEY SEE AS THE PRESENT AGGRESSIVE LAO POLICY.

CHATCHAI SAID HE IS CONVINCED THAT THE SOVIET UNION IS STRONGLY SUPPORTING LAOS. HE NOTED THAT ONE POSSIBLE COUNTER WOULD BE FOR THAILAND TO ASK CHINA TO EXTEND THE CHINESE ROAD IN LAOS FROM PAK BENG TO THE THAI BORDER AS A WAY OF NEUTRALIZING NORTH VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE IN THE NORTHWEST PORTION OF LAOS. KOSON NOTED THAT CHINA MIGHT WELL BE WILLING TO COOPERATE IN SUCH AN EFFORT SINCE RELATIONS BETWEEN HANOI AND PEKING ARE STRAINED TO THE EXTENT THAT COMMERCIAL AIR FLIGHTS BETWEEN HANOI AND PEKING HAVE BEEN SUSPENDED.

7. COMMENT. REGARDING POSSIBLE EXTENSION OF THE CHINESE ROAD BEYOND PAK BENG, IT SEEMS UNREALISTIC TO EXPECT THAT THE LAO, WHO ARE SUBJECT TO HEAVY SOVIET INFLUENCE, WOULD BE PARTICULARLY DISPOSED TO COOPERATE IN PERMITTING ROAD CONSTRUCTION FOR SUCH A PURPOSE. AS SEEN FROM BANGKOK, WE DOUBT THE LAO WOULD BE WILLING TO RISK INCURRING THE ENMITY OF THE VIETNAMESE AND SOVIETS IN THIS MATTER.
WHITEHOUSE

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